

Kirkham Brothers Band

By E. Kay Kirkham

While there will be numerous extracts from the journal of both James and George Kirkham about the Kirkham Band, we would like to make this separate narrative about the band as a group, the children of this one couple, George and Mary Ann Kirkham

For many years the Kirkham Band, the four brothers, played for dances and entertainments. They started in the period when the price of admission was often paid by wheat, potatoes, squash or some other commodity.

In those early days they furnished the music for pioneer dances when Brigham Young and other Church officials were in attendance. They not only played together but each achieved individually in music ability. They were known from Logan to St. George for the concerts and programs in which they sang and played in pioneer days.

Each of the quartet played several instruments. Joseph made his own violins and guitars. The brothers were experts in harmony, each possessed a natural aptitude for music and were quick to memorize their parts which they played with a freedom which made their music delightful. It was a delight to hear George play the big bass viola, shaking his friendly head to the dancers as they went shirling by. Hyrum running the beautiful obligato on the piccolo, Joseph carrying the delightful melodies on the lead violin and James playing the viola and singing the changes of the quadrilles.

The Kirkham Band was in demand at all celebrations such as the Fourth of July and the Twenty-Fourth of July. Their greatest popularity was reached when they played for public dances. As one old-timer put it, "When their music started it fairly lifted you off your feet."

They played in Alpine, Cedar Fort, Draper, Fort Herriman, American Fork and nearby mining towns and other place that they were most popular. Sometimes they played two or three times a week. At home, in Lehi, it was in the Old Music Hall and Garff Hall that they played.

Working all day, playing at nights, they would become fatigued. When on their way home from parties in the old white top wagon, they would often go to sleep and trust the faithful team to bring them safely home.

The history of Lehi would hardly be complete without a record of what the Kirkham brothers did in the way of early pioneer life. The four brothers were respected and admired by the people. Their lives were completely interwoven with the achievements of the community where they lived and helped to establish a place to live.

The melody and harmony of the Kirkham Band reflected the joy, love, and spiritual devotion of the four Kirkham brothers. They helped to make the world happier and better. Many of the Kirkham brothers' children and grandchildren are today taking an active part in the musical life of the communities where they live.

While it seems apparent that the early band was composed of the original four sons of George Kirkham, they did play in public and in church individually, in duets and in conjunction with James Smuin, band of Eliza Astington, sister to Mary Ann Astington Kirkham, they did play as a group band in the various parts of the county and State,

Millen Kirkham, a younger son of Hyrum Kirkham, one of the original band, recalls that his father would go and play all night with the band only to come home, curl up on the floor behind the coal stove for a few hours sleep, then to go out to the farm and work all day.

At one time they had played at a dance in Eureka, they played all night

and then took the train back to lehi. Millen Kirkham recalls that at one time the conductor of the train said to them, “You are to play at a dance tonight in American Fork so just stay right on the train and you can get there in time.”

It is said that you cannot criticize success, and as musicians they were successful. Few people did so much for the upbuilding of the musical arts in a pioneer community as did the Kirkham Band of early Lehi.

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